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Statement submitted by Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aoteaora, New Zealand, Church Women United, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church (USA), Salvation Army, The United Church of Christ — Board for World Ministries, United Methodist Women, Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

We, a coalition of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations, welcome the opportunity to address the sixty-third session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

We continue to envision a human community where the dignity and sacred worth of every woman and girl is recognized and the participation of everyone is valued. We affirm God's world was designed and intended to be one of abundance for all creation, and all persons are born with inalienable rights which should be respected and honoured. It is our conviction that no person should be excluded based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, religion or cultural practice. Diversity should be celebrated as a gift bestowed on all by our Creator.

We remind the Commission of the important role that faith-based organizations play in the advancement of women and girls. Gender justice is a vital and integral part of the mission of faith-based networks. Our coalition works to promote the economic and spiritual empowerment of women of all ages and girls, while we develop theological resources and advocacy tools to equip churches to address structural barriers to women's human rights.

Some key areas of concern:

Social Protection Systems

There are a multitude of ills that plague our societies. Poverty and hunger persist. Traditional aid programs are failing to address the root causes of poverty and hunger globally. Though we have seen progress and significant gains being accomplished through the efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2, there is still much left to be done. The current socio-economic system is broken and pursues micro-level solutions to macro-level problems. If governments do not confront the social and economic disparities that exist, the wide gap between those who are extremely wealthy and in power, and those who are on the margins will only increase exponentially. Decent work protects and promotes human dignity and is central to any effort to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development at a global level. More women are unemployed or working in an informal economy with no social protection or security. Whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunities with men to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Existing institutional structures and cultural barriers are inherently gender-biased, requiring critical examination and radical transformation. These barriers — in government, corporate, social, academic, educational, civil, familial, and religious structures — prohibit equality between women and men and deny women's rights. Socio-economic inequities and systematic injustices must be acknowledged and directly addressed. Women must have full access to the formal and informal sectors, so they can participate in their own liberation and create their own thriving future, enjoying the basic rights and protections they inherently deserve.

Access to Public Services

Within the realm of social protection, access to public services is important. The faith community, alongside governments, continues to provide a broad spectrum of health services including maternal and child health services which contribute to the achievements we have seen locally and globally.

Systemic barriers, cultural-social beliefs and practices, discrimination, violence, and lack of funding prevent women and girls from benefitting from educational opportunities. Child, early and forced marriages and lack of safety result in girls dropping out of school at alarming rates. While resources have been put into primary education, women have limited access to secondary, technical and post-secondary education. This further diminishes the chance for full participation in economic, political and social decision-making and prevents opportunities to attain sustainable work.

There are paradigms of patriarchy, perpetuating violence and reinforcing ideas that women and girls should not or cannot be educated. Education, which optimizes the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, is key for redressing gender injustice and gender-based violence and overcoming discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

Deeply destructive paradigms also prevent women and girls from the opportunity to exercise their own agency, particularly, as it relates to their own sexual and reproductive health and rights. Many women and girls are hindered from accessing treatment due to poverty, geography, or weak health care systems. In addition, HIV-positive women, women with disabilities, migrant women, poor, ethnically and or racially oppressed women face even greater discrimination when trying to obtain treatment and access to comprehensive health services.

It is critical to note that sexual violence in contexts of militarism and conflict involving state or non-state actors persists and destroys communities. The endemic culture of legal impunity for these crimes is a barrier to addressing this violence. Survivors are not offered sufficient care and protection.

From our faith perspective, access to safe health services is the inherent right of every woman and girl. A gender-sensitive response to the health care needs of women and girls must confront the changing social, cultural and economic factors that put them at risk. It also demands intentional investment and funding that reach women of all ages and girls. Gender equity awareness and engaging men and boys in this work are also imperative in changing societal and individual behaviours.

Sustainable Infrastructure

The contributions of women and girls to their communities, from farming to family care-giving; to architecture, technology and more, are invaluable. However, lack of access, isolation (particularly for women in rural communities), inadequate infrastructure and transportation (which can hinder the exchange of goods and services), environmental conditions and climate change hinder the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities. Drought, deforestation, rising sea levels causing salination of water supplies, and the prevalence of natural disasters, due to environmental degradation and climate change, all contribute greatly to food insecurity.

Therefore, the role of women in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts must be supported. Women's access to critical resources — including health care, especially sexual and reproductive health services, education, transportation, economic development, and access to markets for trade — as well as security and protection for victims of sexual violence must be prioritized to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendations for the United Nations and Member States

We firmly urge Member States to:

- Fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action, and additional vital international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, and the Sustainable Development Agenda
- Eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls as stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council Resolution 1325 as well as following resolutions related to it
- Consider faith communities as integral partners in the protection and promotion of women's human rights
- Increase access to education and training for women of all ages and girls
- Affirm women's rights to own land, to obtain loans, and to market goods
- Dismantle privatization schemes that undermine fundamental social services, including education, health care, transportation, and jobs
- Uphold the human rights of women including their right to full access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and services, free from discrimination and violence
- Promote equitable sharing of authority and responsibilities in all aspects of society, and equal access to economic and political power and decision-making bodies
- Create comprehensive legal protection for women and girls against discrimination, particularly regarding employment, housing, education and health care and for the victims of sexual violence, assault, harassment, abuse
- Ensure medical treatment for survivors as well as provide psycho-social services and support

We, the Christian community, are called by God and, we the peoples of the United Nations are implored by the Charter to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person. " As enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are entitled to basic human rights. The implementation of policies and programs designed to benefit women of all ages and girls must be prioritized.